



HOLY _____
Habits



21 DAY DEVOTIONAL

As followers of Jesus, we have the opportunity to incorporate rhythms in our lives to become more like Him. Some call it discipleship or formation.

Here at Grace we call it

HOLY *Habits*

Join us for three weeks as we create space for God to develop that work in us.





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01. The Pursuit of Holiness

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

— Ephesians 4:22-24 NIV

I used to have the wrong idea of holiness. I thought it was about attempting to be perfect or extra-religious. I tried to be holy through behavior modification, not through a desire to be intimate with God. It was stiff, empty, and unnatural, lacking the relational aspect. Thankfully, after accepting Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit helps us put an end to our sinful nature. Then, by God's grace, we can put on a new, spiritual nature—one that is righteous and holy.

So, what does it mean to be *holy*?

Holiness means being set apart *for* God. Just like the habits and disciplines of any successful person set them apart *for* their profession and *from* everyone who is not at their level. Evidence in their life proves they are dedicated and committed to what they do. It's obvious.

Is there evidence in your life that proves you're a follower of Jesus? Do your daily thoughts and actions lead to a life that makes you different from the world and your culture? Do you do the things He has commanded you to do? Or, do you live like the world yet claim Christ?

Please don't let this fill you with guilt or shame for not being "holy," but let it encourage you to make a change. It's never too late, and there's no better time to start than now. The Bible

makes it clear that God desires us to be different from the world and all its evil—distinct from everything common. Let Jesus be your example for living a holy life set apart for Him.

And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God.

— Titus 2:12 NLT

God does not desire for you to live a life of religious obligation. Instead, as a follower of Jesus, God calls you to pursue a life of holiness. Your habits and devotion to God shape this way of living, making it a lifestyle. Holiness will not only benefit you in your own life but also encourage and inspire other believers (and unbelievers). The way you live could be the turning point for someone else to come to Christ and make Him Lord of their life.

02. A Life of Holy Habits

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;
for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."
— 1 Peter 1:15-16 NIV

To become holy, you must first form daily habits that align your thoughts and actions with God. These habits should transform your heart and mind to be more like Jesus. To do this, observe Jesus. Do what He does. Make His life a template for yours. In other words, follow His "*holy habits*." Holy habits are the spiritual practices of a godly life based on the teachings and practices of Jesus and the Word of God.

Let's examine this idea:

A **habit** is a recurring, often unconscious pattern of behavior acquired through frequent repetition.

A **godly life** no longer seeks satisfaction through a sinful lifestyle but is surrendered to God and His will.

You see, the more often you apply the ways of Jesus to your life, the more second nature they will become. As you choose to walk on the path of holiness, you become set apart not only *for* God but also *from* the world. You begin to turn from sin, fleshly desires, unrighteousness, godless pursuits, meaningless activities, and anything in opposition to God.

For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.
— 1 Thessalonians 4:7 NIV

When you face challenges, temptations, and distractions, your habits will have prepared you to make the right choices. They will lead you to the path of righteousness rather than the path of

wickedness. However, suppose you aren't intentional in creating holy habits that guide and shape your life. In that case, you will drift away from God and become like the world—embracing the things opposed to God. You **MUST** be diligent.

Training in holiness sounds like a great responsibility, but thankfully, you don't have to do this in your own strength. You have received the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus calls the Helper. He helps you overcome your flesh and convicts you of your sins. He gives you the strength and guidance you need to live a holy life pleasing to God. All you need to do is invite him in and accept the help He offers.

As you adopt holy habits into your life, I hope your heart and mind are deeply transformed. Following Jesus should produce a spiritually mature life. One in which you're full of devotion to God, glorifying Him in everything you do.

A Prayer to Start Your Day

“God, I invite you to be Lord of my whole life, not just in spiritual things, but in ALL areas of my life. I ask that you make your desires my desires and that your thoughts become mine. Transform my heart and mind to surrender to your will and all that you have for me. Create in me a passion for your ways and your path that leads to holiness. Help me form daily habits that bring about evidence in my life that I am called and devoted to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.”

03. The Bread of Life

But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say, ‘People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”

— Matthew 4:4 NLT

Recently, I woke up feeling much different than usual. I felt worn out and tired, even though I got a full night's sleep. I felt empty, hopeless, and just a little “blah.” My spirit was trying to tell me I needed something. At first, I thought, “I must be hungry.” But I'm always hungry in the morning.

As I took my first step out of bed, I recognized the feeling of emptiness. It was the lack of God's Word in my life. I always do my morning prayers, but I hadn't opened the Bible in weeks and felt the consequences. I needed God's Word, and my soul knew it.

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

— John 6:35 NIV

Jesus calls Himself the “bread of life,” referring to Himself as our sustenance, declaring that to thrive spiritually, we need to depend on Him the same way we physically depend on food and water. We *need* Him *and* His words.

Imagine not eating for weeks (maybe you've done this). Your mind and body become weak and tired, and your quality of life is very poor. Your lifespan is also significantly reduced. In the same way, without being fed by God's Word, your spiritual life is depleted. Your soul grows weary, making it extremely easy to fall into temptation and justify your sin. You lack godly character and conviction. You lose judgment on what is right and just—

relying on your own thoughts and judgments or those of the world. Your faith withers, and so does your hope, opening the door to anxiety and fear. The result is an ungodly life. Sounds like a great way to live, doesn't it?

Trying to be satisfied by your own thoughts, the culture's opinions, sinful desires, or worldly wisdom is like trying to live on junk food and candy. It's sweet, addictive, and tasty but rots your gut and teeth. You may think it's making you full, but it's making you sick. You can't expect to be healthy when you're living on something that kills you. God's Word nourishes your soul, satisfying those who hunger for it.

You're not to worship or praise the Bible itself; that would be idolatry. You're to worship the One who gives the words that supply life. And how blessed are you to live in a time where it's easier than ever to access the Bible? It's literally in your pocket and in the palm of your hand. You can hear from God at any moment.

When you have the Holy Spirit (as does anyone who believes in Jesus), the Bible is not merely a collection of wise words; it's alive—speaking to your heart and your soul. As a follower of Jesus, you should crave Him and His words the way you crave food and water. Jesus is your daily bread. Wake up and be fed by the Giver of life. His Word satisfies even the most empty and deprived soul. The Bible should be a necessity in your life, not a commodity. Essential, not just valuable.

04. What Do You Consume?

“Turn my eyes from worthless things, and give me life through your word.”

— Psalms 119:37 NLT

I used to watch reality TV shows because watching others do things I'd never do was entertaining. My husband always asked me (in a loving way, of course), “Why do you watch this garbage? Is it benefiting your life?” I didn't find it harmful since it wasn't making me stumble into sin. But over time, his question got to my heart, and I felt the Lord say to me, “You have the freedom to watch whatever you want, but is it bringing you closer to me?” The more I thought about it, the less I desired these shows because they weren't bringing me closer to Him. It made me think, “What is it doing for my life and my relationship with God?”

Anything you consume—books, movies, news, podcasts, music, etc.—either draws you closer to God or separates you from Him. It may seem insignificant, especially in the moment, but every little thing adds up—shaping your worldview and influencing how you think and act.

Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts.

— Proverbs 4:23 GNT

Worldly media tends to normalize sin and make it seem “ok.” When your mind is full of what ungodly people produce and approve as acceptable, you become desensitized to sin. This is the world's touch on believers, and it's catastrophic. The more you consume, the more vulnerable you become to believing it—

talking and acting like everyone else.

So, what's the cure? How do you break free? It's simple. Replace the worldly things with godly things. Reach for your Bible, not the remote. Spend time praying, not time scrolling. Get in the habit of consuming what builds you up and grows your relationship with God.

Reading the Bible is the greatest way to purify your mind and cleanse you of the world's poison. God's Word is where you discover what is true, right, pure, and lovely. Allow the Word to influence your thoughts and shape your worldview. You will experience a closeness with God, who gives you what you need—lasting hope, joy, and peace.

05. Doers of The Word

Jesus replied, “But even more blessed are all who hear the word of God and put it into practice.”

— Luke 11:28 NLT

The Bible is not a storybook for our entertainment. It wasn't written to make us feel good or to check a box on our religious duty list. The Word of God points us to Jesus and shows us what He did to save us and how we should live. It's a guide to living a holy life; it blesses those who apply it, not just read it.

I once tried putting together a piece of furniture from IKEA. I skimmed through the manual and thought, “I got this.” I began putting it together without referring to the instructions (because I obviously knew better than the person who created this thing). Wrong! I redid it over and over again until I had a finished product that looked right. But even then, I still had pieces and screws that were unused—no surprise. And over time, the furniture began to fall apart.

This isn't a real story. It's merely a picture of our lives when we read the Word but don't do what it says. We think we got it, yet *forget* most of what it says, don't *believe* what it says, or live out what we *think* it says—doing what seems right to us.

There is a way that seems right to a man, but
its end is the way to death.

— Proverbs 14:12 ESV

There's a reason God gave us a blueprint on exactly how to live our lives. He gave us His Word to be a lamp unto our feet and a light onto our path. He gave us His Word to show us how to love. He gave us His Word to convict us of our wrongs. He gave

us His Word to teach us what is right. He gave us His Word to prepare and equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Being a doer of the Word means you do what is right and true, even when you don't feel like it. You can trust that the Bible is true. Following what it says will put you on the path of righteousness, blessing your life.

Practice This Habit

Pick a passage of scripture that has been somewhat challenging to live out in your life. Maybe it's about forgiving, submitting, giving, fasting, or trusting. Whatever you pick is true and good, so you can't go wrong. Read it over and over and meditate on it. Let it soak in and fill your mind. For the next week, look for ways to apply that scripture directly to your life.

God's Word will prove to be faithful and fruitful, blossoming in your life as you give it time to be rooted in your heart and mind. You will taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8).

06. Forgiving Others

“If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

— Matthew 6:14-15 NLT

It's pretty obvious we're regularly surrounded by immorality, lust, jealousy and envy, short tempers, hostility, and the like. In other words, works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). Even as followers of Jesus, we have the tendency and temptation to react with our flesh rather than respond with our spirit. So it's no surprise that people will sin against you and do wrong to you (and you will probably do the same). It could be something as minor as breaking promises, hurtful words, or telling lies. Or something as serious as stealing, adultery, or even murder.

Ask yourself this question: "How do I treat and respond to others who sin against me?" Be honest with yourself. Let it convict you. But don't be mistaken; it's okay to be angry toward others because you should value justice just as God does, but you are not to sin in your anger. Instead, you are to show mercy and forgiveness. Wouldn't you want the same done to you? You cannot receive what you are unwilling to give. If you forgive others, God will forgive you. If you don't, He won't.

Jesus said it himself: we are to always forgive people no matter how often they sin against us (Matthew 18:22) and to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). Practice being a person who is slow to anger and quick to forgive—being patient and kind toward others. As you get in the habit of forgiving others, you will be blessed by God for it.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”

— Matthew 5:7 ESV

Is there anyone in your life that you need to forgive *right now*? Maybe it's a hurt from your past, or perhaps it's something that happened this week or even today. Holding on to that hurt for too long will grow into resentment and bitterness toward that person. This kind of attitude is not holy or pleasing to God. Forgiveness needs to start in your own heart.

Prayer Prompt

Take some time to sit in silence and think about the pain someone has caused you. Realize and accept that you can't control the actions of others. Now, let go of that pain and surrender it to God. Allow God to take care of the consequences, not you.

Ask God to give you the strength to genuinely forgive that person and be freed from the hurt. This may take some time, but you will get there. As an added prayer, pray *for* the specific person who hurt you. Ask God to bless them (Luke 6:28). Ask God for that person to draw near to Him (James 4:8). And apologize on their behalf to God (Luke 23:34).

07. The Seriousness of Sin

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

— 2 Corinthians 7:10 NIV

Before I gave my life to Christ, I was unable to recognize sin as sin. I was blind to it. But something unexpected happened when I was born again. The Holy Spirit opened my eyes to the righteousness of God, and I became aware of the *seriousness of my sin*. I could clearly see it for what it was—a path to death and destruction, a selfish act against God.

I regularly fell to my knees, apologizing to God for all I had done and thanking Him for all He had done. I was full of godly sorrow and wanted to be made right. But as life went on, I found myself minimizing the importance of repentance. I would shrug off sin and maybe sometimes throw up a quick apology to God, knowing He would forgive me.

As a culture, we have become desensitized to sin and the things in opposition to God. Sin has become normalized and accepted these days—often encouraged and celebrated. It may not always look destructive on the outside, but it's destroying us on the inside and our relationship with God without us even knowing. We need to get to a place where we know we're sinners, and the only way to be made righteous is through the blood and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. We need to repent.

"I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners and need to repent."

— Luke 5:32 NLT

Repentance isn't a plea to get you out of trouble with God,

feeling bad for doing wrong, or saying sorry. It's a sincere change of heart and mind, motivated by love for God, that gets us to turn from our evil ways and commit to doing what is right and pleasing to God. Allow the thought of the seriousness of your sin to lead you to godly sorrow—a regret and sadness that brings you to the feet of Jesus. Not because you should be full of shame and guilt but because it leads to forgiveness.

Sin can slow your spiritual progression or even stop it, but genuine repentance allows you to grow and develop spiritually again. Make this a regular, daily habit in your life.

Practice This Habit

Is there anything you need to repent of? As you read the Bible, pray, and listen for God, are you sensing conviction to ask for forgiveness in any area of your life? Ask for forgiveness, and God will forgive you.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

— 1 John 1:9 NIV

08. Exchange Worry For Peace

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.
— Philippians 4:6-7 NLT

It's no surprise that anxiety and worry are an epidemic today. There's so much we are told to worry about in this world. We're bombarded by news of terror, tragedy, and threats, not to mention the demands of everything else in our own personal lives—health, finances, relationships, etc. The truth is, most of my worry stems from thinking I have more control than I really do. When I experience trials, stressful situations, or battling my thoughts, I believe somehow worrying will solve them. Instead, it brings me anxiety—more problems.

Did you know there's not one place in the Bible that says Jesus ever worried? Not one. He was troubled, grieved, and distressed but never worried. God tells us, "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything." And you know what will happen? You will experience God's peace that goes beyond understanding, the same peace that is so evident in the life of Jesus.

Prayer does not erase the challenge ahead. In fact, God may not solve your immediate problem or give you what you *want*, but He will offer you an unexplainable peace that protects and gives you what you *need*. This peace is the freedom from the disturbance of your situation, not the absence of it.

So, think about it...what is your first response to bad news, stressful situations, and challenges? Is it worry, or is it prayer? The good news is that worry is a *bad* habit that can be replaced with a *good*, holy habit. Prayer should become your *first* response, not your last.

I want to encourage you; there is no need to fear. God has already gone before you. You can trust that He will never leave you. It's a promise. Let that truth bring you peace and comfort.

"It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."

— Deuteronomy 31:8 ESV

Practice This Habit

Pause... Pray, Obey.

When worry enters your mind, first, pause. Allow yourself to realize what is making you anxious. Once you've become aware of it, pray. Tell God what you need and thank Him for all He has done.

Finally, take that thought captive to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). This means to submit your thought life to God. Replace any negative thoughts with thoughts that are true, right, and pure (Philippians 4:8).

09. Ask Him for Anything

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

— John 15:7-8 NIV

I went to college 2,676 miles from home, with an entire ocean between my parents and me. I was so far from home, and like any typical freshie, I was broke and hadn’t learned to “adult” yet. I’d call or text home and ask my mom for money, or for advice, or to make me a doctor’s appointment. Days would go by, sometimes weeks, without talking to her, and something else would pop up. I’d call her (like clockwork) and ask her for something else.

I didn’t even realize this was how I treated my relationship with my mom until one day, she said, “Baby, you only ever call me when you need something. I want to have a relationship with you and talk to you about other things. I want to hear about your day. Tell me about your friends and how school is going. I’m happy to help you, but I want more than just your requests.”
Oof, dagger to the heart

It was like her words were the audible voice of God. I’ll never forget it. At that moment, I realized this is how I also treated my relationship with God. He was a “genie in the sky” type of God to me, only coming to Him when I needed something for my own benefit. My intentions were in the wrong place. I had to get honest with myself. I was using prayer to try and get what I wanted, not what God wanted.

“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

— James 4:3 NIV

God is pleased to give you the things you ask for, but more importantly, He wants your heart. He wants your desires to be aligned with His. God delights in hearing your thoughts—the things that worry AND excite you. He knows everything but wants *you* to understand what pleases Him. He wants you to know *what* you should ask for in *His name*.

When the Word of God begins to live in you and rule your heart, you will want what He desires for you. Therefore, you will ask for things according to *His* word AND *His* will. Then Jesus, like He promised, will do them—bearing fruit in your life and proving to the world you are His disciple. This also glorifies the Father because people will see things done in His name, not yours.

Prayer Prompt

As you spend time in prayer, let your requests be known to God, but also ask Him to give you an understanding of His will. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you. Ask Him to be glorified in your life. Ask Him to align your heart with His. Ask Him in Jesus' name so He will give you what you ask.

10. The Sound of Silence

The Holy Habit of Silence and Solitude

I wait quietly before God, for my victory comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will never be shaken.

— Psalms 62:1-2 NLT

When was the last time you intentionally found absolute silence? Do you remember what silence sounds like? (And I'm not talking about the Simon and Garfunkel song). It may seem like silence sounds like nothing at all, but it's actually the void of sound that allows you to clearly hear the voice of God. The loudest voices usually aren't the ones you should be listening for. I call this "noise"—things you hear or listen to that keep you from hearing God. It's often your own choice to fill your day with this noise—social media, podcasts, music, TV, radio, etc. And it's usually within hand's reach, making it difficult to turn off or resist.

Noise isn't inherently bad or wrong, but if it's what you listen to most, it could be. Much of what is broadcasted today is worldly foolishness and godless opinions—distracting you from what's important. If you allow it to control your thoughts, this will undoubtedly separate you from God. Instead, allow God to influence your thoughts, and He will protect your mind, and you won't be shaken by the noise. Do you want someone's opinion or the truth of God?

As a generation, we're so used to the endless noise that many of us have developed a mind of unrest. You can turn the noise off, but your mind continues to run and crave the noise. This distraction affects your focus and develops a short attention span, making it difficult to be silent or pray for long or even

relatively short periods of time. You know the feeling. An uneasy anxiousness if you go too long without filling your time with *something*.

“Be still, and know that I am God...”
— Psalm 46:10

What if you made that *something* quiet time with God? Filling the “in-between” time with silence, scripture, and prayer. A time to hear the still, small voice of God—the one overpowered by the world’s noise. If you don’t take time to be still and listen for God, how can you expect to hear His voice, be filled with peace, or receive *anything* from Him?

Practice The Habit

Try turning off the noise for 15 minutes daily to be silent. Trust me, it’s going to feel awkward and unnatural at first. You’ll think about all the things you need to do. You’ll want to grab your phone. You’ll fight the silence. Not to mention, it will likely be inconvenient and hard to find time for silence. You may have to “go away” and seek silence like Jesus did. Sit in your room, lie in your yard, or go on a walk. Whatever you do, don’t bring the noise with you—keep it away! Be willing to do whatever it takes to be in silence. The more silence becomes a habit, the more you will see its fruit in your life—less anxiety, freedom, rest, and a deeper relationship with God.

11. The Reward of The Secret Place

“But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”

— Matthew 6:6 NKJV

Jesus’ solitude and silence is a significant theme in the Gospels. It’s how He began His ministry. It’s how He made important decisions. It’s how He remained patient and compassionate toward others. It’s how He dealt with the demands of His ministry and, ultimately, how He prepared for his death on the cross.

Jesus’ schedule was FULL, but He was never in a hurry. He was never too busy for people or for God. Jesus was constantly interrupted and bombarded by people from left to right, but He was rarely inconvenienced. He didn’t let his attention on the Father be taken away. He remained full of peace, rooted in the moment, even in the midst of storms. This is mainly due to Jesus’ priority of spending alone time with the Father.

Thankfully, Jesus didn’t just tell us about the secret place. He demonstrated the importance of it. He developed a habit of removing Himself from daily life, people, and the demands of His ministry to be alone with the Father and pray (Luke 5:16, Mark 1:35, Mark 6:46).

We all need time alone with God. Most of our days are busy and stressful. And *IF* we have any downtime or get bored, it’s all too easy to fill our time with things that are less important than quality time with the Lord.

When you spend uninterrupted time in your secret place, you can learn what it means to slow down—to adopt an unhurried lifestyle like Jesus. One where you can be full of peace, moving at God’s pace, not demanding more of yourself than you can handle.

So, what is the “secret place?”

Your secret place doesn’t have to be your room or a closet. It’s anywhere you can find silence and solitude. A place where you experience the stillness and presence of the Lord. A place that gives you the freedom to express your worship to Him. I find this secret place outside in nature, connected to God’s creation, usually on a walk.

Jesus also said that the Father will reward us openly for the time spent in our secret place. What does this mean? This could mean answered prayer, blessings, and rest—all good things, but I believe the most crucial reward is a godly life. The more time you spend with your Father, the more your heart will be aligned with His. You will come out of your secret place, a changed person. You will walk through life bearing the fruits of the Spirit produced in you, and others will see and notice it.

Ponder This Habit

Is your secret place a sacred place? Or do you allow anything to creep into that place? Your secret place should be off-limits to *everything* else in your life. It should be a holy and sacred place for you and God alone. Diligently guard it with your life. It’s that important.

12. What Really Matters

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

— Mark 1:35 NIV

One tragic night, my husband and I received devastating news. Our baby's heart had stopped beating in my womb at full term. This is the absolute worst news you can receive as an expecting parent. To make it even harder, I still had to go through with the labor and delivery of our son. He was born into Heaven, straight into the arms of God. I don't wish the pain of losing a child on anyone. Still, in our deepest grief, we experienced a closeness with God that we'll crave for the rest of our lives. It was the most painful yet most transformative season we have ever been through.

In the few weeks following the loss of our son, we spent most of our days in silence and solitude with God. This happened unintentionally and out of necessity. There was nothing else we could do or wanted to do. We stopped everything we thought was *SO* important—house projects, shopping for the holidays, social media—all the worldly things that compete for our constant attention. The things that filled our “busy” schedules didn't matter anymore. We turned off life's constant noise and sat with God.

Heaven and the One who made it became more real than ever. In our solitude, we received the healing we desperately needed. We gained clarity on what mattered. And we felt an unexplainable peace and closeness with God. At our lowest and weakest point, God was our strength. We would've missed it all had we filled our time with noise and busyness—avoiding the reality of what had happened. Instead, we chose to spend time

in silence with God. People asked us how we remained faithful and full of hope through such a tragedy. Our answer? "God is the only one we can rely on to give us what we need."

I hope you don't need to experience a tragedy to realize the importance of the habit of silence and solitude with God like we did. I hope these words and our story will encourage you to do so today__ I believe we can all have the same closeness with our Father in Heaven without being brokenhearted. Use Jesus as your example. Turn off the noise and go to your secret place with Him. Slip away to an isolated place by yourself to be with God. Make it a necessity. He will meet you there. He will speak to you, heal you, comfort you, and bless you. It will become your most treasured time and place.

13. The Great Reversal

“And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.”

— John 13:14-15 NLT

The image of Jesus washing the feet of His disciples wrecks me. What a beautiful example of the greatest becoming the least. Jesus sets the standard for serving others by demonstrating it, then says, “Do as I have done to you.” He shows us that the kingdom of God is upside-down and backward from what we think to be true. He tells us, “The first shall be last, and the last shall be first.” Eugene Peterson (author of *The Message Bible*) calls this *The Great Reversal*.

“But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then.”

— Mark 10:31 NLT

This is challenging. Not because it’s difficult to serve but because it requires a shift in our philosophy of life. We’ve been taught that success makes us great. You must earn a position of respect through your accomplishments. But this is not how you become great in the kingdom of God. To truly be great, you must reduce yourself to the position of a servant, like Jesus did, serving in humility. Humility gets down low and lifts others up. Using your time, talents, and treasure to help others is great, but be cautious of motive. If you’re not intentional, service can be done out of pressure to please people and uphold an image. It’s like wearing a badge that says, “Look at this kind thing I did to help someone.” That’s nice, but Jesus urges us to make

service a lifestyle, not a gimmick. Servants, the least important, are often rejected by the world. They're looked down upon and rarely noticed. So don't think more highly of yourself than you really are. How people view and treat you for how you live and serve God should be of no concern. Don't let it keep you from doing good.

This isn't about being a "good person" and fulfilling your Christian duty. This is about character. Service to others is a habit that will transform your pride into humility. Let the love of Christ motivate you. Look to Jesus as your example. He wasn't just kind; He sacrificed His own comfort and convenience for the benefit of others. He did not use His equality with God for His advantage or to rule with power. Instead, Jesus humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death (Philippians 2:8). He went as far as dying on a cross for you and me. How far are you willing to go?

Practice This Habit

Where do you feel most important in your life? Your job? Your family? Your friend group? Your church? Instead of viewing yourself as an important leader, see yourself as a servant needed by those around you. Willingly make others more important. That's how you become great in the kingdom of God.

14. Finding Your Purpose

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

— Mark 10:45 NLT

Like many, my husband and I went to church most Sundays. We would say hi to everyone, engage in small talk, worship, listen to the sermon, and then leave. This gave us the feeling of being part of the community, but in reality, we were just church-goers. We knew serving others and being part of the community was good. However, we only ever talked about it, never taking action. We made excuses that we were too busy with all our “things.” You know, kids, house projects, hobbies, family time, leisure, and work. (I’m sure you can relate.) We told ourselves we didn’t have the time *right now*, so we kept putting it off.

It wasn’t until we went through a family tragedy that we became fully aware of the importance of serving. During our grief, our church family showered us with loving care, generosity, and sacrificial service. The Church (the body of Christ) came together to help someone in need as God intended. Their kindness demonstrated the importance and impact of serving in a community of believers. It filled us with a heart for service. Our purpose became clear. We found our mission. We knew we were meant to love and serve God and others—following the mission of Jesus.

Many people spend their entire lives not knowing how God can use them. They wait or make excuses. We know because that was us. Don’t be someone who keeps putting it off. Get involved now. Look for opportunities to serve people, especially those who belong to the family of God. You will begin to discover and use gifts you never knew you had. The ones God

has given all of us to use for the benefit of others. You are valuable and needed in the body of Christ.

It's also important to get to know people in your church and let them get to know you. The beautiful thing about the body of Christ is that we are stronger and more impactful when we're unified and working together. Everything you do will be for nothing until you realize it's not about you.

Practice This Habit

Do you need help discovering your purpose and mission? Don't know which gifts God has given you to serve? Let God lead you by serving wherever the church needs help. Start by getting in the habit of saying yes to service.

God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.

— 1 Peter 4:10 NLT

15. Choosing to Love

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

— John 13:34-35 NLT

The most misunderstood and misused word; love.

You can love God, and you can love food. Are they equal? No. Yet they get the same word to describe your affection toward them. Also, the world has stolen the meaning of love and made it a definition of itself: “Love is love.” How much more confusing could it be?

As a culture, we’re clearly confused about the purpose and meaning of love. No matter what the world tells you, love is not a feeling you get when you like someone or something. Love is not affirming someone’s actions and choices because it makes them happy. Love is not staying silent when someone opposes God because it makes you uncomfortable to share the truth with them.

Love is a choice and an action. It’s how you care for someone. You can say you love someone, but do you show it? Jesus said those who keep His commands are the ones who love Him (John 14:21). We don’t show our love for Him by quoting what He says but by doing it.

Most importantly, love is a motive of the heart, a desire to love God and people how He loves us (1 John 4:19). Put another way, love is the heart of service. Serving others with patience, kindness, compassion, forgiveness, humility, and selflessness. Putting others before yourself. Accepting those who are rejected. Taking care of those in need, especially the poor, the widows, and the orphans. It’s even giving to those who hate and

mistreat you—the ones who make it difficult to love them. Jesus commands us to love God, ourselves, our neighbors, AND our enemies.

*“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies,
do good to those who hate you, bless those
who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”*

— Luke 6:27-28 NIV

Let’s be clear: you’re to love the person God created, not the evil they do. Serve them the way you would serve anyone else. Do to them as you would want them to do to you. As Eugene Peterson says, “If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life” (Luke 6:30 MSG).

Love is what marks you as a believer and follower of Jesus. Your love is a witness to the spiritual power of the Gospel. How you love people will prove to the world that you follow Him. This kind of love will set you apart from the world.

What do you have to lose by serving people with selfless love? Your reputation? Your life? Jesus said whoever loses their life for His sake will save it. What more incredible promise do you need?

16. Where Your Treasure Is

“Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.”

— Matthew 6:19-21 NLT

Do you spend most of your money, save a little, and then give whatever is leftover, if any? Or do you give generously, save a lot, and spend only on what you need? The philosophy of the world is to *spend, save, give*. The philosophy of God is to *give, save, spend*. It’s completely backward. Unfortunately, many of us share the philosophy of the world. Our garages are too full of junk to park a car. We’re in thousands of dollars of debt we can’t repay. We buy the newest phone upgrade before it’s even released. We have way too many clothes but nothing to wear. No wonder anxiety, depression, and suicide are at an all-time high.

Let Jesus’ words echo in your mind: *“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* Think of it this way: your thoughts become actions, your actions become habits, and your habits determine your lifestyle. If your mind is fixed on earthly things and spending, your heart will be heavy with the burden of getting more and better. You may know the feeling. It may bring joy for a while, but it will soon fade. The truth is, none of your stuff goes with you when you die. Why let something that doesn’t last forever be your master?

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

— Matthew 6:24 NIV

Serving money doesn't imply you have a lot of it. The implication is that you obsess over it, making it an idol. It becomes your god. When you're devoted to something, you constantly think about it. You do *whatever* it takes to get more of it. One way to ensure your freedom from the bondage of money is to give it away. When you do, you're free to serve God without limit—finding your security and joy in Him, not in something temporary.

I encourage you to turn your spending habits into giving habits. If money and possessions have a hold on you, give them away. If you see someone in need, help them with what you have. If you have more than enough, give to people who don't. I'm not saying you should give it *all* away. Be responsible with what you've been given and use it wisely. But be generous, not stingy. Use your money to glorify and honor God.

When you make giving a holy habit in your life, God will bless you with the "more" you've been seeking all along. More peace, more joy, more freedom, more goodness. When you give to the needs of those around you, you align yourself with God's will. You also store up treasures in Heaven that can't be destroyed or stolen. And know this: you can *never* out-give God. It's all His anyway, so be generous.

17. A Cheerful Giver

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

— 2 Corinthians 9:7 NIV

Nothing makes me more joyful and fulfilled than when I give to and help someone in need. It's strange how when you give, you receive. But Jesus did say, "It's more blessed to give than receive" (Acts 20:35). The kind of reward you receive from giving isn't always what you might expect. It's not a way to get more of what you want. You're not presenting an offering to "the universe." Sometimes you receive more of what you give, but it often comes as soul satisfaction. Filling you with joy and purpose. Giving is a way to let your light shine. It's an act of love and kindness that stems from a genuine faith in Christ.

You would think that the more you make, the more you can give—the less you make, the less you can give. This is true if you see it only as a transaction. But giving isn't measured by *how much* you give. The true value of your giving lies in your intention. For example, Jesus praised a woman who gave all she had to live on, which was only a few cents. When your heart is in the right place, your generosity will have a greater impact than you ever thought possible.

No matter your level of wealth, remain faithful and joyful in your giving. It will often require a sacrifice. You may need to deny your own wants to fulfill the needs of others, but it will free you from becoming a slave to money. Jesus tells His disciples that it's hard for someone rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. He's not shaming wealth. He's pointing out how a person can easily depend on money and things for security rather than God.

We're also taught that you reap what you sow (2 Corinthians 9:6). Give generously, and you will receive generously. Give sparingly, and you will receive sparingly. Jesus tells us to give to everyone who asks (Luke 6:30), to give to those in need who can't repay you (Luke 14:13-14), and to freely give what you have freely been given (Matthew 10:8).

The world of the generous gets larger and larger; the world of the stingy gets smaller and smaller. The one who blesses others is abundantly blessed; those who help others are helped.

— Proverbs 11:24-25 MSG

As a believer, you have the wonderful opportunity to give to those in need and further the mission of the Gospel. At first, giving away what you've worked hard for, earned, or received is challenging. But as you get in the habit of giving, it becomes easier. You learn to be content with what you have, whether you have a little or a lot. Give to those in need and experience the blessing and joy of the Lord.

18. No One Stands Alone

Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.

— Romans 12:4-5 NLT

You and I, and all believers, are the body of Christ. We're the physical representation of Jesus, the head of the body, to the world. We are wonderfully diverse in culture, background, status, and race—from all walks of life. What brings us together and makes us a family is our belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior, making us one in Christ.

During the time of losing our son, we considered ourselves part of our church community. However, we weren't as deeply connected as a family should be. But through our tragic loss, we experienced something so beautiful and powerful. It was something we had never seen before. We witnessed the body mourn together, pray together, serve together, give together, and carry our burden with us. (You can imagine how this impacted our relationships with our church family). This demonstrates *true* love—the body of Christ functioning in unity as God intended. It's the result of believers regularly coming together for a common purpose.

Our unity as a body serves a vital role in witnessing to the world—showing we are set apart for God. This is why we can't neglect the habit of gathering together in fellowship. Seeing believers unified in Spirit and mind speaks to people's inner desire for connection. And there's no denying that God created each of us with a longing for belonging. It paints a beautiful picture of how the Church is meant to operate. The Church is meant to live in harmony, building each other up with love and

service.

You're a valuable member of God's family with gifts and skills meant to be used. You serve an essential role in the body of Christ that no one else can fill. The body needs you, and you need the body. When one suffers, we all suffer. When one rejoices, we all rejoice. When one mourns, we all mourn. We carry each other's burdens and lift each other up. And we share all we have so that no one is lacking. We don't just talk it out; we walk it out. No one stands alone.

19. Interdependence

All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

— Acts 2:44-47 NIV

You know those occasions, usually around the holidays, when your friends and family come together for quality time? Everyone is in good cheer and wants to help, give, and love one another more than usual. Conversations are engaging, and people are fully present. It's special. You cherish those moments together, but it disappears too quickly. The holiday ends, and everyone returns to their everyday lives. It could be months or even an entire year before that special gathering happens again. What if that meaningful time together was a regular occurrence in your life?

Well, it can be and should be. The problem is, here in America, our Western culture celebrates individual independence. Even in our immediate families, we do most things separately. We have our own friends, enjoy our own activities, and eat meals separately. And it's crept into the Church. We tend to think we're better off on our own, neglecting the greatest resource we have, each other.

Instead of being independent, we need to get in the habit of becoming *interdependent*. The Church isn't meant to be a group of individuals; it's meant to be a unified family. Living and loving like one.

If you spend too much time isolated—disconnected from the

body—you become vulnerable to attacks of the enemy. You start believing lies that pull you into discouragement, doubt, unbelief, loneliness, and depression. This happens when you default to keeping your private life private.

Gathering with other believers is much more than just going to church on Sundays and feeling part of a community because you see familiar faces. Those faces should be more than acquaintances or friends; they should be family because they are. The purpose of the family of believers is to build each other up, help each other with needs, and be on missions as a team. Together, we serve our community and the world under the lordship of Jesus.

It's easy to say, "I'll call or text you," and never follow up. You make excuses and put it low on your priority list. Days turn into weeks, weeks turn into months, and...you know the rest (I'm talking to myself here). It's the illusion of getting together. But you know it won't happen unless you make an honest effort. Let's quit putting off gathering together. We don't have time to waste. This is important!

Let us be concerned for one another, to help one another to show love and to do good. Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer.

— Hebrews 10:24-25 GNT

20. The Cost of Holiness

“I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to this world any more than I do. Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth.”

— John 17:14-19 NLT

You DO NOT belong to this world. Nor do you belong to the evil one or people who rule over it. You belong to the most high God. The one and only true God. And you will be with Him for all of eternity.

As you walk out Jesus’ prayer (above) and begin to live a holy and godly life, you will look different than most people. That’s okay. You will find favor with God, and you will likely find favor with many people. Your spiritual life will blossom. You will be content with little and with much. You will be full of peace. You will be blessed.

But...it won’t be easy. You will lose friends and win enemies. You will face challenges and have to make difficult decisions. You won’t be perfect. You will be tempted, and you will fall short. You will also be hated and mistreated by others because of your devotion to God. Some will misunderstand your intentions. Some will label you as self-righteous. Some will mock your beliefs. Some will criticize you for not being like everyone else. Some will hate you because you don’t affirm cultural norms. Some will call you evil, though you do good. Some may even try to kill you.

Please, don't let *any* of this discourage you from following Jesus. It's all worth it! It's worth anything you lose in this life for what you gain in the life to come. Remember, you're not here to please people; you're here to please and honor God. Let His thoughts and opinions of you matter more than anyone else's. And I'll tell you something amazing: God loves and cherishes you. He gave His one and only Son to die for your sins so that you could have everlasting life with Him. You are truly valued by God.

These holy habits don't earn you more love from God; they actually help you love Him more. When you live as God intended, you begin to understand the greatness of His sacrifice. And you'll be compelled to return His love by giving everything to follow Him. You will sing His praise and glorify His name. You will never want to live any other way—no turning back. You will be forever transformed.

For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God. Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name. I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever.

— Psalm 86:10-12 ESV

21. Your Time on Earth

So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days.

— Ephesians 5:15-16 NLT

The average human life is about 4,000 weeks. This may seem long, but it's relatively short compared to eternity. Because time is limited, you can't do anything and everything you please; your life will eventually end. Instead, you must be wise and intentional, making the most of every opportunity.

There are many things you can do with your time here on Earth. If you're not deliberate, your precious time can easily be robbed by godless pursuits and activities: social media scrolling, playing video games, binge-watching, materialistic shopping, toxic or abusive relationships, striving for success, working obsessively, and being lazy. These things can be labeled as distractions, but even worse, they're time killers. Stealing your hope, peace, and joy.

Enjoying things with little meaning or purpose isn't inherently sinful. However, they can become idols, which is a sin. Be careful not to waste your time. Nothing should be more important than God. Even the Bible says you have the freedom to do anything. But not everything is beneficial for living a holy life (1 Corinthians 10:23). In other words, not everything builds your character, enhances your spiritual life, or makes you more like Jesus.

If you desire a godly life, your holy habits must be intertwined with *everything* you do. Holiness needs to become a lifestyle. Otherwise, you will get to the end of your life no closer to God and look no different than those who don't follow Jesus.

“Eternity is a long time to regret a wasted life.”

— John Piper

Your time is valuable. Cherish it. Take time to pray. Take time to read scripture. Take time to be in solitude. Take time to serve those in need. Take time to gather with the family of God. Take time to pursue holiness. Remember, holiness means being set apart *for* God and *from* the world. Your life should be different than that of unbelievers because you choose to use your time wisely.

Enjoy life! Jesus did. Just don't let leisure and pleasure be your reason for living. Spend time creating habits that create your future and bring you closer to God. Allow the fulfillment of Jesus' commandments to bring you joy. I encourage you to put your life to good use and become holy as He is holy.

Notes



